

Message Text

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SUBJ: PRESIDENT DA COSTA VISITS GABON

1. SUMMARY. STP PRESIDENT DA COSTA, ACCOMPANIED BY FOUR MINISTERS, MADE FIRST STATE VISIT (SINCE INDEPENDANCE JULY 12) TO GABON NOV 20-22. THERE WERE TWO DEVELOPMENTS OF INTEREST; THE EFFORT TO REDUCE THE CONFLICT IN THE TWO COUNTRYS' POSITIONS VIS-A-VIS ANGOLA AND THE SIGNING OF AGREEMENTS WHICH LAY GROUNDWORK FOR ECONOMIC RELATIONS AND ASSISTANCE.

2. PRESIDENT DA COSTA, HIS WIFE, AND THE MINISTERS FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION (D'ALVA), EDUCATION (DO ESPIRITO SANTO), HEALTH (DA GRACA) AND PUBLIC WORKS (DIAS), IN SPITE OF FULL CEREMONIAL SCHEDULE DURING TWO-DAY VISIT IN LIBREVILLE, HAD TIME TO CARRY ON SERIES OF CONVERSATIONS WITH PRESIDENT BONGO AND COUNTERPART MINISTERS IN GOG. ANGOLA WAS MAJOR TOPIC OF DISCUSSION BETWEEN TWO PRESIDENTS. TWICE DURING VISIT THEY DEALT WITH SUBJECT PUBLICALLY, AND WHILE EFFORT MADE TO PHRASE CONFLICTING POSITIONS IN CONCILIATORY LANGUAGE FINAL IMPRESSION WAS OF GSTP CLEARLY ON SIDE OF MPLA AND GABON, BY INFERENCE FROM ITS "NEUTRALIST" POSITION, OPPOSING NETO'S GOVERNMENT.

3. FINAL COMMUNIQUE DID OFFER A SMALL HOPE FOR EVENTUAL

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RECONCILIATION OF DIFFERENCES. AFTER PRAISING GABONESE

INITIATIVE IN ORGANIZING CENTRAL AFRICAN FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING AND NOTING ITS "POSITIVE" RESULTS, DA COSTA SUPPORTED NEXT MOVE IN BONGO'S DIPLOMATIC CAMPAIGN ON ANGOLAN ISSUE, A CENTRAL AFRICAN CHIEFS-OF-STATE CONFERENCE IN LIBREVILLE.

4. COMMENT: STP DIVERGED SLIGHTLY FROM THE CONGO, OTHER MPLA SUPPORTER AT CENTRAL AFRICAN FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING, BY SIGNING FINAL DOCUMENT (LIBREVILLE 1913). DA COSTA'S BACKING FOR NEXT STEP IN ESCALATING DIPLOMATIC CAMPAIGN TO END ANGOLAN FIGHTING LEAVES ROOM FOR SPECULATION THAT STP COULD BE MOVED FROM PARTISAN SUPPORT OF MPLA TO COMMON CENTRAL AFRICAN POSITION IN FAVOR OF "NATIONAL UNION GOVERNMENT". END COMMENT.

5. BILATERAL RELATIONS WERE MORE HARMONIOUS AND BY END OF VISIT A GENERAL AGREEMENT FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES HAD BEEN SIGNED AS WELL AS SPECIFIC AGREEMENTS IN FIELD OF COMMERCE, TELECOMMUNICATIONS, POSTAL AND BANKING SERVICES, MERCHANT MARINE, LABOR AND CIVIL AVIATION. TWO GSTP MINISTERS (D'ALVA AND DIAS) RETURNED TO LIBREVILLE NOVEMBER 23 TO CONTINUE NEGOTIATIONS FOR THEIR IMPLEMENTATION.

6. COMMENT: FROM STP POINT OF VIEW, IT IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT TO DEVELOP COMMERCIAL RELATIONS TO FILL VACUUM LEFT BY PORTUGAL. OVER LONGER TERM, THERE MAY BE MARKETS FOR STP FISH, VEGETABLES AND FRUITS IN LIBREVILLE, BUT IMMEDIATE PROSPECTS FOR TRADE WITH GABON ARE POOR OTHER THAN OCCASIONAL TOURIST TO THE ISLANDS OR MIGRATION OF SAO TOMEANS TO LABOR-HUNGRY GABON (SMALL COMMUNITY OF SAO TOMEANS ALREADY WORKING IN LIBREVILLE). HOWEVER, POLITICAL CIRCUMSTANCES IN ANGOLA AND PORTUGAL LEAVE GABON AS PRACTICALLY ONLY COUNTRY WILLING TO TRY TO DEVELOP COMMERCIAL TIES AND ABLE TO OFFER SOME KIND OF ASSISTANCE. THIS FACT BROUGHT SHARPLY INTO FOCUS DURING DA COST VISIT WHEN PRESIDENTIAL PARTY ARRIVED IN LIBREVILLE ABOARD BORROWED AIR GABON JET. GABONESE AIRLINE NOW REMAINS ONLY SCHEDULED PASSENGER SERVICE CONNECTING THE ISLANDS TO OUTSIDE WORLD --- THROUGH LIBREVILLE.DEJARNETTE

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